



# United States Department of the Interior

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Vale District Office  
Baker Field Office  
3165 10<sup>th</sup> Street  
Baker City, Oregon 97814  
<http://www.or.blm.gov/Vale/>

IN REPLY REFER TO:  
1792

Dear Interested Citizen:

The Baker Resource Area Field Office, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) and finding of no significant impact (FONSI) for the implementation of a 230 acre prescribed burn on BLM administered lands located approximately 5 air miles north of Bridgeport, Oregon. Under the preferred alternative, the project could be implemented as early as the spring of 2000, depending on weather conditions. The Oasis Prescribed Burn Project is being proposed to reduce hazardous fuels buildup and improve forest health conditions on these lands.

The Oasis Prescribed Burn Project is a small-scale project that will be implemented in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service's Oasis Prescribed Burning and Precommercial Thinning Project. The Forest Service project, which is now in the implementation phase is broader in scale and scope, however the BLM is proposing to take advantage of the timing and implementation of that project as both projects are located in the same area and have similar treatment needs.

The BLM would like your comments about the project to assist in finalizing the planning. If you would like to express your concerns, provide specific comments about implementation of the project, or otherwise become involved, please write to me at the above address or fax me at (541) 523-1285. I would appreciate hearing from you by February 15, 2000.

I have enclosed a copy of the EA/FONSI for your review and comment. Thank you for taking the time to comment on this project. If you have any question regarding this proposal, please contact Rubel Vigil at (541) 523-1438.

Sincerely,

*s/Penelope Dunn Woods*

Penelope Dunn Woods  
Field Office Manager

Enclosures

**OPTIONAL EA, FONSI and DR FORM**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**EA NUMBER: OR-035-13**

**BLM Office: Baker Resource Area**

**Lease/Serial/Case File No.**

**Proposed Action Title/Type:** Oasis Fuel Treatment Project

**Location of Proposed Action:**

Township 11South, Range R41E, Sections 29,30, 31 and 32.

**Applicant (if any):**

Not Applicable

**Conformance With Applicable Land Use Plan:**

This proposed action is subject to the following land use plan.

**Name of Plan:** Baker Resource Management Plan **Date Approved:** 7/12/89

This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

**Remarks:** The project location is within the U.S. Forest Service's Oasis Prescribed Burning and Pre-commercial Thinning area which is located approximately 5 air miles north of Bridgeport, Oregon. The Forest Service completed a Categorical Exclusion (1/11/99) for the National Forest System Lands surrounding the BLM's project area. The BLM is proposing to treat approximately 230 acres using the same method of treatment (under-burning) at the same time the Forest Service implements their burning treatments on lands adjacent to BLM lands. The implementation of this project is necessary to reduce stocking levels and fuel loading. Implementing a joint project is cost effective for both agencies and the American public

**Need for Proposed Action:** The purpose of this project is to protect and enhance the unburned forested stands surrounded by extensive areas burned during high-intensity stand-replacing wildfires of 1986 and 1989. The unburned stands of the Oasis Analysis Area are a major portion of the habitat remaining for forest cover dependent species. These stands (on NFS and BLM administered lands) are similar in tree-size, species composition, stand density and structure, fuel loading and fuel profile, to the stands which were destroyed by the wildfires.

There is a need to do what is possible to direct the development of existing stands to achieve this desired future condition, and to protect them from disturbances which would retard the attainment of these long-term management objectives. Reconnaissance and analysis have determined that the stands proposed for restoration area at risk of large-scale disturbance (from insects or wildfire, or both) which would cause them to regress rather than move forward, and that the treatments planned would help alleviate the risk.

**Description of Proposed Action:** There are 230 acres of BLM lands within the Oasis Project Area, all of which would be under-burned in a mosaic pattern. The 230 BLM acres are broken out into three burn units (Units # 111, 112 and 113, see attached map), all of which are surrounded by US Forest Service administered lands. Most of the BLM lands were commercially or pre-commercially thinned in the past, have larger diameter ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir trees (compared to the previous group of stands), and an accumulation of decayed slash and natural fuels. Priority of burn units (those to be burned first) is based on geographic location, resource objectives, fuel loading, and access. The BLM will implement under-burning activities during the time the Forest Service implements their treatment activities on units that surround BLM lands. This will allow the BLM to take advantage of timing and will reduce the overall cost associated with implementation of this project. This is a 2-6 year project which is scheduled to start in 1999( USFS portion) and be completed by the year 2004.

The burn parameters are: a maximum of 0-10% additional bare mineral soil exposure; a minimum of 90% survival of leave trees and ; a reduction in fuel loading of the smaller fuels (<3") while meeting the first two parameters. The timing of the under-burns would be primarily in early spring, however some burns may occur in the fall if burn prescription parameters can be met.

**General Setting:** The project area is located approximately 5 air miles north of Bridgeport, Oregon and near the Dark Canyon area. BLM lands are surrounded by NFS lands that are going to have the same type of treatment implemented on them. Access onto the BLM portions can be made via State Highway 7 (over Dooley Mountain Pass) or through the Sutton Creek County Road east of Baker City, Oregon.

**Scoping:** The project EA was mailed to approximately 17 individuals, agencies, interest organizations, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation during the 15-day comment period, which is scheduled to end February 15, 2000. Internal scoping assisted in designing mitigations for implementation of the project. Comment letters were received and addressed in the decision record. Where appropriate, people were contacted and additional information provided.

#### Other Alternatives Considered but not Developed in Detail

The No Action Alternative is to do nothing. The BLM would not participate in the treatment to reduce fuels build-up and enhance the unburned forested stands. The Forest Service would be required to place fireline around the BLM tracts of land before they implemented prescribed burning activities. Fuels build up would continue creating a hazardous fuels situation. Additionally, the existing stands would continue being overstocked resulting in greater susceptibility to insects and disease.

A proposal resulting in the BLM treating the 230 acres at a different time period was considered. This proposal would allow the BLM to treat the forested stands through a focused effort on BLM lands only. This alternative was not analyzed in detail because the BLM felt it was beneficial to implement this project simultaneous with the US Forest Service to maximize project implementation efficiencies.

#### Environmental Impacts:

Critical Element	Affected		Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Air Quality	X		T & E Fish		X
ACECs		X	T & E Plants		X
Cultural Resources		X	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		X
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		X	Water Quality		X
Floodplains		X	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		X
Native American Religious Concerns		X	Wild & Scenic Rivers		X
T & E Animals		X	Wilderness		X

## Environmental Consequences:

Air Quality The presence of smoke from the implementation of prescribed burning operations will cause a short-term discoloration of the air within the Dooley Mountain Area. It is probable that smoke will drift into the Baker and Burnt River Valleys, however this will only be short-term. The BLM and Forest Service will operate within the Oregon State smoke management regulations.

Roads and Access Management: No new roads will be constructed to facilitate planned operations. All terrain vehicles (ATV's) will be used to access areas inaccessible by road. Appropriate access permits will be sought for operations access (on Forest Service roads, where appropriate). Where ATV use from operations is apparent, the BLM in cooperation with the Forest Service (Burnt Powder Fire Zone), will camouflage road entrances with vegetation or by other means in order to prevent the creation of additional roads.

Snags and Green Tree Replacement: Snag retention is not expected to be impacted by the implementation of this project. The prescribed burning prescription requires 95% retention of existing snags. Ninety-five percent of the existing down logs greater than 12 inch diameter will remain following this prescription. After burning operations, resultant stands will be fully stocked at the 100% green tree replacement level.

Old-Growth Habitat: There is no old-growth habitat in the Oasis Analysis Area. Project activities are designed to promote large tree character.

Farmlands, Prime/Unique: There are no Farmlands, Prime/Unique lands within the project area. Project activities within the BLM portion are not expected to impact Farmlands, Prime/Unique lands along the Burnt River Valley (located "downstream" from the project location) as the result of the implementation of this project..

Cultural Resources: An intensive cultural resource inventory was completed on BLM lands for the Oasis Project during the fall of 1999. Standard inventory procedures were followed, with an emphasis on land within 1/4 mile of perennial water, aspen stands, ridgelines, and slopes of less than 30% within the project area. No historic or archaeological cultural resources were found, and the project will therefore have no effect on any cultural resources on or eligible for the National Register. No heavy equipment will be employed in the implementation of this project.

Floodplains: There are no perennial streams present within the project area, however there is an ephemeral channel approximately 1/4 mile in length located in section 32. All of the prescribed burning will take place primarily on upland slopes. Burning activities will not take place on or through floodplains.

Environmental Justice: There are no anticipated impacts to any specific cultural/ethnic or economic populations in this area as a result of the implementation of prescribed burning project within the Oasis analysis area. This is due to the small scale and scope of the project.

Native American Religious Concerns and Treaty Rights: There are no known or anticipated religious or treaty right concerns that would be affected by the implementation of this project.

Threatened and Endangered Animals: A Biological Evaluation (BE) was conducted by the U.S. Forest Service within the project area. The Forest Service report indicated that T&E species habitat existed for the North American lynx, California wolverine, Pacific big-eared bat, Preble's shrew, and Blue Mountain cryptochain within the Oasis analysis area. There are no T&E animal species known to be present in the project area on BLM lands. The report concluded "The proposed Oasis burning and pre-commercial thinning project is not expected to pose any adverse negative impacts to any of the above listed species."

Threatened and Endangered Fish: There are no perennial streams within the analysis area. The project implementation will take place primarily on uplands. No prescribed burning will take place within riparian areas, reducing or eliminating impacts to downstream fish habitat conditions.

Threatened and Endangered Plant Species : A limited focus sensitive plant survey was conducted on portions of the Oasis analysis area by the U.S. Forest Service botanist during the 1997 and 1998 field seasons. No threatened or endangered plant species are known or likely to occur in the project area. Most of the effort was placed on ridge lines, scab-lands, wet areas and areas where fire lines will be established. It was determined that a complete survey was not needed because of the limited

impacts that are anticipated for the project. Fire will not be purposely introduced into riparian areas, and rocky outcrops and scabs should not burn at high enough intensity to harm any sensitive plants that may occur. Although there are a few species that could potentially be found in the general forested habitat, it is anticipated that the project should not negatively impact any populations of these species. This is because the project involves very little ground disturbance, and it is assumed that these species evolved with fire and therefore will tolerate light burning.

Wastes, Hazardous/Solid: There is a slight potential for an unforeseen spill (diesel) during the time the fire crews are lighting the fire; however, all safety measures would be strictly enforced during the time the “lighting fuel” is being applied to initiate burning activities.

Drinking/Ground Water Quality: No impact is expected.

Wetlands/Riparian Zones: As discussed above, burning activities will not be conducted on wetlands or riparian zones. In addition, the BLM's portion of the projects area contains only a small amount of riparian. As a result, there are no negative impacts anticipated as a result of the implementation of this project.

Wilderness: There are no designated Wildernesses within or adjacent to the project area.

Wild and Scenic Rivers: There are no designated Wild and Scenic Rivers within or adjacent to the project area.

Soils: Prescribed burning may result in 10% mineral soil exposure. Areas of high fuel loading could burn hot enough to severely burn soil, however this effect is usually limited to 2-10% of the treatment area. These severely burned areas (the base of trees and tree root passages) will be well distributed throughout treatment areas and will be relatively small in size. They will recover naturally with time (10-15 years). The BLM will consider implementing it's burning operations during the spring to minimize potential impacts to the soil resource.

Minerals: There were no mineral concerns identified as a result of the implementation of this project.

Visuals: The project area has a Class III visual resource management (VRM) designation (partial retention of the landscape character). Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. The BLM parcels are not very noticeable from State Highway 7 or the Burnt River Valley. There will be short-term visual impacts associated with the implementation of this project. This will occur immediately after the project work is completed and last for approximately one year. This is the result of “blackened” areas after the fire moves through the project area. Prescribed fire would be far less visually impacting than a potential catastrophic wildfire. The proposal is consistent with Class III VRM objectives. Staggering the timing of the prescribed burns over the total project area will lessen the short-term visual impact. Fire line construction as proposed is minimal and will also assist with retaining the visual quality of the area. Fire intensities should not be high to prevent severe scorching of mature trees. Fuel loading appeared light at the ground level and should be consistent with lower intensity fires.

Wildlife: Some animals would be displaced due to fire activity in the area when burning operation are initiated. Some small animals could lose specific habitat as vegetation and other types of natural fuels are consumed by the fire. However, it is unlikely any animals would be eliminated from the project area. There are no long-term effects anticipated with the implementation of this project. Long-term benefits include increased quality of forage for big game animals.

Rangeland Resources: This project is located within the North Bridgeport Allotment. The BLM's 230 acres make up less than 5% of the entire allotment. Cattle use on BLM lands within the project area is light. Re-introduction of fire into this area will create increased forage over time. Low intensity burning within the bluebunch wheatgrass plant associations may stimulate growth, and increase root reserves. These factors cause many grass species to induce reproduction, both from seed and vegetative means. The net result of implementation of this project will be an increase in forage production, and forage vigor. These increases will be both in the number of plants, and in the size of the plants. Forage quality will also be increased as more nutrients become available to the grass species. The BLM requires resting rangeland after the implementation of a prescribed fire for two growing seasons.

Noxious Weeds: The project area was surveyed for noxious weeds. Small amounts of bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) plants are scattered throughout the project area. Bull thistle is not a formally recognized noxious weed within Baker County, although it should be monitored for spread. The BLM will attempt to “burn around” them if possible, although they are not expected to impact the site as they are short-lived plants.

Recreation: Recreational hunting takes place in this area during the fall. It is expected that there will be a short-term impact to hunters during the year the prescribed fire takes place due to big-game displacement. This area also receives small amounts of use by local residents for the purposes of gathering fuelwood and dispersed recreational activities. This area has no special recreation designation or Visual Resource Management (VRM) class that would preclude these activities from being implemented.

Other Land Uses, Rights, and Facilities: There are no other known Land Uses, Rights or Facilities within the project area.

Socio-economic: There are no expected impacts to the Socio-economic environment as the result of the implementation of this project, due to the project's limited scope.

### **Monitoring**

BLM personnel will be on-site during the actual implementation of the project. The project will be implemented concurrently with the U.S. Forest Service. Key personnel will include the BLM Fuels Technician, and the Resource Area's Forester. A BLM Resource Advisor may be called-on to advise U.S. Forest Service personnel during project implementation.

### **Persons/Agencies Consulted or Contacted:**

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (Baker Field Office)  
US Forest Service (Baker and Unity Ranger Districts))  
Private landowners near the project area  
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation  
Oregon Department of Forestry  
Auburn Gulch Allotment permittee (USFS permittee)  
Natural Resource Conservation Service  
North Bridgeport Allotment permittee (BLM permittee)

**Preparer(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Environmental Coordinator:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action with the mitigation measures described in this EA ( OR-035-13) will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required.

Authorized Official: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **MITIGATION MEASURES/RATIONALE**

1. It is the responsibility of the BLM to continue to manage forested stands in such a way to achieve resource objectives through time. In this case, the BLM is implementing this project to improve forest stand resiliency and reduce fuel loading so the risk of catastrophic wildfire may be reduced.

2. It is the goal of the BLM to reintroduce periodic low intensity fire in order to restore historic fire regimes. Managed fire can achieve many of the same results as pre-commercial thinning, such as reducing stocking or encroaching climax tree species and concentrating growth on fewer trees thus restoring large tree characteristics sooner.
3. It is also the goal of the BLM to use prescribed fire in appropriate locations for the purposes of reducing fuel loadings and reduce the potential for and intensity levels of large wildfires.
4. The burn prescription would establish a burning window that would allow smoke dissipation during the actual burn. This parameter would lessen impacts to visual qualities with the airshed.
5. The prescribed burn would be jointly implemented with the U.S. Forest Service in order to take advantage of timing and reduced labor and implementation costs.
6. A BLM Resource Advisor and the Resource Area's Fuel's Technician will be present during the time of implementation to help coordinate activities and resolve any resource concerns.
7. No new roads will be constructed. All Terrain Vehicles will be used to implement the project in order to prevent soil compaction.
8. The prescribed burning prescription requires 95% retention of existing snags.
9. Prescribed burning operations will not be implemented within riparian areas. Within this project area, there is only one ephemeral channel that is approximately 1/4 mile long.
10. A cultural resource survey was conducted. No cultural resources were found.
11. If necessary, burn operations will be directed around infestations of noxious weeds to prevent their spread.
12. The prescribed burning activities on BLM lands will be implemented through a low-intensity under-burn that will meet resource objectives while preventing impacts to sensitive plant species (if any are subsequently discovered).
13. The implementation of this project provides the BLM and U.S. Forest Service with an opportunity to jointly implement a project that has similar treatment needs while reducing the overall costs associated with the project.

## **DECISION RECORD**

I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan (Baker RMP, p.40). It is my decision to implement the project based on the rationale and mitigation measures described above.

Authorized Official: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Notice of Decision  
Oasis Prescribed Burn Project**

**United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Baker Resource Area  
3165 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Baker City, Oregon 97814**

Notice is hereby given that on February 18, 2000, Ted Davis, Acting Baker Resource Area Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, issued a decision to authorize the implementation of the Oasis Prescribed Burn Project near Dooley Mountain, Baker County, Oregon. This decision authorizes the implementation of a 230 acre prescribed burn plan to reduce hazardous fuels buildup and improve forest health conditions on these lands. Measures to mitigate prescribed burning operations will be implemented as identified in the Oasis Prescribed Burn Project EA (OR-035-13). Implementation of this project may start as soon as the spring, 2000.

This project is consistent with the BLM's 1989 Baker Resource management Plan and the Vale District Fire Management Activity Plan (1998). The location of the prescribed fire project is as follows: Township 11 South, Range R41E, Sections 29, 30, 31 and 32. A copy of the Decision Record may be obtained by writing to the Baker Resource Area, Bureau of Land Management, 3165 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Baker City, Oregon 97814 or by calling (541) 523-1438.

For a period of 15 days from the date of publication of this notice in the Baker City Herald, this decision shall be subject to protest and/or appeal (43 CFR Part 4). Interested parties may protest this decision by providing written comment or objections to the Baker Resource Area Field Manager, at the above Baker City address. Protests/appeals must be filed within the 15 day time period to be considered.

Dated: February 8, 2000 Baker Resource Area Field Manager: s/Ted Davis, acting